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ABSTRACT

This study examined the questions of what alterations to teacher preparation programs are needed to better accommodate the older, second career person. Focus of the study was on a group of students who had been recruited from industry into a special science/mathematics teacher preparation program. Recommendations for teacher education program improvement are based on the following findings: (1) the students were most interested in the practical aspects of their studies; (2) they have less tolerance for bureaucracy than they did as undergraduates; (3) they require more support during both the preparation program and the induction year; (4) all were proficient in the content area of instruction; (5) novice teachers who were parents had difficulty working with entire groups; (6) all felt that student teaching was the most useful part of the program; and (7) studying the induction year of teaching revealed many areas which need to be addressed during preservice preparation in order better to prepare the career transition individual. Without special preparation, industry professionals who become mathematics and science teachers do not necessarily apply the skills and content knowledge of their former careers to their teaching. (JD)

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SECOND CAREERS--SECOND CHALLENGES:

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE OLDER TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENT

Paper Presented at the 1989 Annual Meeting
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SECOND CAREERS-SECOND CHALLENGES: MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE OLDER TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENT

Introduction

Changes in demographics, increased early retirements, and expressed personal needs for finding a calling have brought older and more experienced people to many universities in search of a second career (Adelman, 1986; Carey, Mittman, Darling-Hammond, 1988). Preliminary findings stemming from this study of first year mathematics and science teachers give direction to improvements in teacher preparation programs which are beginning to experience a shift to this older, more experienced student population.

Background

As discussions occur on school reform, the restructuring of teaching as an occupation, and the reconfiguration of teacher education programs, advocates of change need to become more aware of what the work of teaching means to a new, more mature group of novice teachers. Resulting renewal must also take into account the need for a different mix of components in the preparation programs of teachers from those based on research conducted among a more traditional group of students (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986).

One of the central purposes of this study was to answer the question: What alterations to teacher preparation programs are needed to better accommodate the older, second career person?

Description of the Study

A two year study conducted in three states focused on the first-year teaching experience of second-career individuals. Three groups of novice teachers who received their preparation at the same institution and who were teaching in similar situations were studied in each of the locations. The focus group was composed of those who had been recruited from industry into the Encore Project, a special science/mathematics teacher preparation program sponsored by Chevron (Madfes and Schwartz, 1988). Two comparison groups of first year teachers--traditional first-career and second career teachers not in the special program--were also participants. Researchers employed ethnographic data collection techniques including in-depth interviews and multiple classroom observations, as well as content analysis of personal logs, and survey instruments to acquire as much data as possible about the motivation for entering, the preparation for, the performance in, and the attitudes towards teaching of three groups of novice teachers.

The three universities involved in the study were diverse not only in their geography but in the composition of their teacher preparation programs. One institution is in a state which mandates preservice teacher education only as a post-baccalaureate program, whereas the other two grant teacher certification through both undergraduate and alternative, graduate programs. All three sites have experienced an increase in the number of college graduates returning to school to prepare for a second career as a teacher. All three sites also housed the specialized Encore Project for second-career individuals preparing for certification in science and mathematics.

Due to the small size of the sample, generalizations to all second-career teachers can only be suggested at best. The richness of the data, the frequency of contacts with the participants, and the triangulation of data sources, however, provide a number of provocative insights.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Preparation Programs

1. Questions concerning how these second career people felt about returning to school after so many years as practicing professionals revealed a new attitude and understanding about their role as students. They were more interested in the practical aspects of their studies. Jane, a teacher of math in the Houston area, found that she became more interested in why she was required to take specific courses and how the activities in them would prepare her for teaching. This concern for purpose was much different from the concern she had had as an undergraduate:

> In college, you do what you have to do. You don't know really why you are doing it. Perhaps that's one reason people always say they don't get as much out of school the first time as when they go back later. When I went to college to get my degree in Chemistry, I didn't ask "Why do I have to take this; why do I have to take that?" You know, before I just checked off what I had, looked at what I needed to take, and I was happy. I'm going to be a chemist when I get out. But when I went back to become a teacher, I was interested in the more practical aspects of the program. I was more interested in what I was doing when I went back to school.

It is therefore recommended that clearer definitions of applications to classroom practices be made throughout the preparation program.

2. Teacher preparation programs need to provide personal support to older students who have less tolerance for bureaucracy than they did as

undergraduates. These people have less patience for standing in line and being treated as *a number.* As noted by Cindy, a systems analyst, who is teaching math in a private Marin County high school, "It was a little frustrating that it seemed to take a lot of time to get through things and maybe being older, I have less tolerance for the red tape."

3. Data collected through interview, observation, and logs made it clear that all groups require more support during both the preparation program and the induction year of teaching. The assistance of an Encore Coordinator made a positive difference in the on-campus experiences of the Encore students at all three sites. Kurt, a former systems analyst who is teaching at a community college, commented about ENCORE that "it eased my way. Because you know, in changing careers it's really frightening and its really shaky. It destroys your ego." It is therefore, recommended that preparation programs provide special support services as well as built-in ceremonies, rites, and rituals to ease the transition from worker to student to teacher.

4. The observations of classroom behaviors and the interview data indicate that all groups across all sites were proficient in the content area of instruction. They knew the subject matter to be taught. But, all groups across all sites cited lack of skill in subject specific pedagogy. Karen, a 30-year old former civil engineer, who is teaching math and computer science at a suburban Louisiana high school, was surprised to find she wasn't quite as prepared as she thought she would be:

> There's a big difference in knowing the material and teaching it. I don't think I totally understood the difference before and I definitely wasn't prepared for it.

Preparation programs need to place more emphasis on subject specific pedagogy for those who have previously utilized their content area knowledge through applications in business and industry.

5. An interesting revelation is that mid-life career change individuals who have already raised their own children need more, not less, exposure to and practice in student management techniques. Novice teachers who were parents and used to dealing one-on-one with adolescents had great difficulty working with entire groups. Preparation programs must provide increased opportunities for both learning and practicing various student management techniques. One of the older participants in the study described his problems managing mathematics classes in a San Francisco middle school:

> I think most of what you do is more from your previous background than formal training. I was very interested in all those seminars in motivation and classroom management. But whatever I learned, I didn't really apply it as I should have. Like my own kids, I've treated them pleasantly and encouraged them to see that they have choices to do what's right for them.

7. All participants felt that student teaching was the most useful part of the preparation program. Steve, who is teaching middle school science in the Houston area, compared his previous training as an animal researcher to student teaching:

> I found out when I worked in the emergency clinic, I was prepared bookwise, I knew all the material, I knew exactly what to do in any situation, but I'd never seen an animal. I'd never treated a dog that was hit by a car or an animal that had been gun shot or a hysterical client. I knew what to do, we talked about it in class, but I had never dealt with one. Not anywhere. It's a whole different thing. Someone comes in, they're hysterical, they're putting their fist through the wall or they're crying, they can't understand what you're saying, or they faint on you. You can't run to the textbook, you've got seconds to respond. I worked with a guy that never got out of high school' that's the last schooling he saw, and I was

> embarrassed to be around him. This guy was so good because he had the hands on experience and that's what student teaching reminded me of. I got in there and blanked out. You forget everything and just like it did with the emergency clinic it takes a good two months before you feel comfortable.

8. Studying the induction year of teaching revealed many areas which need to be addressed during preservice preparation in order to better prepare the career transition individual. Similar to findings of previous research on teaching cultures (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986; Lipsky, 1980; Hall, 1982; Little, 1982) the career change participants at all sites mentioned the adjustments that they were required to make due to the reduced salary, the lack of feedback on performance, the isolation from adults, the stress, the low status of the role, the lack of formal support mechanisms and structures, and the exciting and frightening autonomy of the classroom. Interestingly, several of the participants did not appreciate the new found autonomy for they had been accustomed to working under greater supervision and with clearer parameters for performance. All participants did, however, appreciate the non-routine elements of teaching. Encore teachers specifically spoke of their discomfort with the lack of closure in teaching as compared to engineering and all of the second career participants were sensitive to the differences in how they were treated by school management as compared to industry management.

Neil, a teacher of math in a Louisiana high school, found that teaching differed from engineering in "just about every way."

> In my other career they were worried about output. It wasn't too important how you went about it as long as the end product was what they wanted. If you acted like a professional, you were treated like a professional. You're not treated that way in education. You have to sign in and sign out; ask permission for this and permission for that. They're not too worried about the outcome, which unfortunately is the students. They worry if your lesson plan is on time and that

> you've done your paperwork, that the referrals are written up properly in case you have to go to court. It doesn't seem like anybody's worried about the students, which is our end product.

Dave, a 42-year old former financial analyst in the San Francisco Bay Area, also described the adjustment to the school environment in terms of how he felt teachers are treated:

> It's like you're not really treated as an adult professional. You get the feeling you're being treated as a kid rather than a functioning adult.

Induction Year

1. The First Career participants made an easier transition to teaching than did the Second Career or Encore participants for they were not carrying the occupational and professional baggage of the experienced worker. They had less to separate from, and consequently could be more positive about what they were going to do. Their expectations about working conditions were not constantly being violated. Further, with the exception of the Encore group at the University of New Orleans, First Career teachers were visibly young, therefore identified as "newcomers." Veteran faculty tended to give these novices support, while the Second Career and Encore participants were older and were assumed to be experienced; support was not offered unless it was requested. Older beginning teachers were often considered "new to the school," not "new to teaching."

2. Counter-intuitive findings have been most provocative; specifically the evidence that the older, more experienced individual is in as much or more need of training and support than other novices. The person who has already been successful in one career and who starts a teaching career at mid-life feels as vulnerable and as inexperienced as a twenty-two year

old who is beginning his first job. This person needs as much guidance and support during the induction year as any other novice if he is to be successful and is to stay in teaching.

Teacher education institutions need to work closely with schools and school districts where graduates find employment to encourage induction year support for all new teachers regardless of how many there are or how old they are. Outreach is critical for the older person who may appear to be confident and competent, but who is really in need of guidance and support.

3. Several of the Encore participants commented on the value of the entire preparation program. They implied that no preparation program could accomplish an impossible goal; that there was a mismatch between the preparation that was feasible during the preservice and induction period and what was expected by school staff, students, and parents. John, a former engineer for a northern California public utility who took early retirement at 50 in order to teach, commented:

> One thing that maybe is different about teaching is that if you go in the first day of teaching you're doing the same thing that a teacher who had twenty years experience does. Where as if you're an engineer, you never do the same thing that an engineer with twenty years experience does. But you're thrown right in the middle of it as a teacher. And I think I find that really different. That brings up the whole question of whether there could be an apprentice program for a teacher. When I started as an engineer this one old technician became really friendly with me and sort of took me under his wing and taught me a bunch of stuff. In a very short time I became extremely confident, over confident almost because I learned this whole new field from him.

The transition to full-time teaching must be carefully restructured to better enable the new teacher during the induction year. Universities and school districts need to explore ways to provide additional support mechanisms for novice teachers as well as opportunities for less than ful time responsibilities during the induction period.

Additional Finding

This study was concerned with more than teacher preparation programs and thus produced a number of other findings. One such finding was that counter to the rhetoric of politicians and business leaders (California Roundtable, 1985; President George Bush Inaugural Address, January 1989), the industry professionals who become mathematics and science teachers do not necessarily apply the skills and content knowledge of their former careers to their teaching. The conjecture was that the content involved in the scientific positions previously held by the Encore participants would manifest itself in the classrooms--it did not. However, all the career change participants did speak of the transfer of organizational and management skills to classroom and bureaucratic tasks.

Close

The Mid-Life Career Change to Teaching Science and Mathematics Study has provided some clues concerning the type of training second career teachers should experience and the support they need once on the job to ensure that they remain in teaching. However, more information is needed for policymakers in industry and education if schools are to benefit from the second-career teacher. Attention must be paid to these studies and the resulting recommendations, or a potential pool of talented teachers may be wasted.

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